

ONCE-A-DAY FEEDING DELIVERS SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS FOR AYRSHIRE CALF REARER

Ayrshire dairy farmer Joe Welsh had some doubts when it was suggested he tried once-a-day feeding for his calves. Many of them were going to be heifer replacements for his 250 herd of British Friesians and he was not prepared to take chances with their rearing.

"We'd always bucket-fed twice a day and felt they did well under this system, so changing to once a day didn't have much appeal," he says. "But I slightly reluctantly agreed to give just one pen a go, although wasn't prepared to make a bigger commitment."

Joe farms with his parents and brother, Andrew, at Warnockland Farm, near Fenwick and batch calves in spring and autumn. He decided to move the trial group on to the new regime earlier this spring.

"The calves stay in individual pens on colostrum and cow's milk until around day five, but then we move them into strawed pens in groups of eight or nine," he says.

"We trough fed the group on a specialist, once-a-day milk powder, gradually increasing the quantity until they were receiving 3.5 litres per day, and as always, kept straw, fresh water and a coarse mix available at all times."

The outcome for the group, he admits, came as a surprise. "The calves did incredibly well," he says. "There were no problems; no scouring and they were just generally healthy and thriving."

"They were a lot quieter; more content and not roaring at all, but quietly chewing the cud a lot earlier than usual."

"They ate more of the coarse mix and by five weeks of age, were consuming 1kg/day."

"We probably could have weaned the group at five weeks, but I was reluctant to do so, and by the time of weaning at six or seven weeks, they were definitely consuming over 1kg of creep feed."

"Meanwhile, we saved several hours of labour a week, and a lot of physical effort in mixing the milk."

The success of the system is dependent on the choice of milk powder, according to Tom Nelson from J&M Anderson Farm Supplies in Stewarton, near Kilmarnock, who supplies the farm.

"Joe had already been successfully using Bonanza Nutrition's Shine milk powder range, so a move to Bonanza's Once-a-day was a logical step," he says. "The product does exactly what it says on the tin and it gives the calves the bloom every farmer aims to achieve."

Bonanza's technical spokesman, Joe Murphy attributes the product's success to its inclusion of buttermilk and skimmed milk powder, alongside a blend of vegetable oils.

"Unlike most milk powders which are whey-based, this product will form a curd in the calf's abomasum, which takes over 14 hours to be digested and accounts for the calves' feeling of fullness and contentment on just once-a-day feeding."

"In contrast, milk powders which make no reference to skimmed milk powder or buttermilk are unsuitable for once-a-day feeding because they contain none of the casein protein which is responsible for forming the curd."

"These products are usually flushed through the calf's digestive system in only a few hours, so are wholly unsuitable for once-a-day feeding."

Back on Warnockland Farm, the Welsh family have put another two pens on to the once-a-day regime.



Andrew Welsh and Tom Nelson

"I wanted to double check that it was not just a 'one-off' pen of calves, but if these pens keep going as they are now, we will move the whole lot over," says Joe.

Quite apart from the good health and performance - as well as the labour that's saved - he says that costs and powder use are also reduced, and the calves can move up to the rearing unit better grown, in better condition and at an earlier age.